

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: THEORY AND TEACHING PRACTICE

Session 7C: ENGLISH LANGUAGE - 1

Title: Understanding intercultural communicative competence

Evdokia Karavas

Introduction

One key feature of the 21st century is change. Disappearing borders are linking people's lives more intensively and immediately than ever before. Unprecedented global flows in information, products, people, capital and ideas are redefining our political, economic and social lives. Globalisation, rapid developments in technology, migration and immigration have transformed the way we communicate, the way we live and work and the composition of our societies. Societies throughout the world have now become multilingual and multicultural. The increasing frequency of migration and mobility especially in Europe has enriched the demographic maps of European countries in the last decade creating new minority ethnic groups living in countries which have until recently considered themselves homogeneous and monocultural. Nowadays societies have become culturally diverse as a result of the immigration of people who have been born in another culture and have brought elements of their culture in the new society they have chosen to settle. According to the Autobiography of Intercultural encounters of the Council of Europe (2009:4),

Sometimes multicultural societies are understood as a patchwork of distinct cultural groups living alongside each other but separately. The reality is usually more complex both because of the internal diversity of different cultural groups and because of the dynamic interaction between different cultures, values, practices and identities in those societies. Societies can respond in different ways to their cultural plurality by public recognition of various minority ethnic, cultural and religious identities and public celebration of their distinctiveness (sometimes called 'multiculturalism'), or by emphasising the common bonds of the society and the shared identity of its members.

Such new cultural groups are particularly vulnerable, easily marginalised and lack social status. In order to achieve social cohesion in such multicultural societies, intercultural dialogue is seen as fundamental. According to the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living together as equals in dignity" (2008) *Social cohesion denotes the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means.* (Section 1.4, para. 24).

Of crucial importance for the maintenance and development of socially cohesive multicultural societies is the provision of educational strategies that raise awareness and



foster intercultural dialogue and communication. Schools will need to be able to educate a more diverse student population. Schools will need to prepare students to interact in a more diverse society and collaborate in a more diverse work environment. Thus, if intercultural dialogue is essential for creating and sustaining social cohesion, intercultural competence is the practical foundation. According to the White Paper "The learning and teaching of intercultural competence is essential for democratic culture and social cohesion". (Section 5.3, para. 151).

Intercultural learning

Pluriculturalism is not a new phenomenon for Greek schools. The ongoing migration that has started since the 1970s has added to our classrooms students from migrant communities such as the Filipino, Bangladeshi, Kurdish, Nigerian, Chinese, Albanian, Russian, Bulgarian, Afghan, Syrian and many more. Recent data from the Greek Ministry of Education show that migrant pupils come from more than 100 different ethnic backgrounds. During the school year 2018-2019, around 12.900 refugee and migrant children of school age (4-17 years old) were enrolled in formal education in Greece.

As a result, our classrooms have become pluricultural and plurilingual. As mentioned above, of crucial importance for the maintenance and development of multicultural societies is the provision of educational strategies that raise awareness and foster intercultural dialogue and communication. But how can we foster intercultural dialogue and communication? Through educational strategies that promote intercultural learning.

Intercultural learning is ..

- Learning to communicate and interact with people of other cultures on equal terms showing understanding and respect.
- Becoming more aware of one's own culture and developing international and cross-cultural tolerance and understanding.

Intercultural learning is not

- Another method of language teaching but integral part of every day teaching practice
- Only the transmission of information about a foreign language/culture but more of it: also a way to understand better our own culture

Intercultural learning concerns all pupils, monolingual and bilingual, native and immigrant children and all classrooms. *It concerns any classroom that may have or may not have migrant students.*

Who is the young intercultural learner?

He or she:

- Is the learner who, from the early years of education, learns to communicate and interact with different cultural contexts



- Is the learner who becomes plurilingual and develops linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language, which are modified by knowledge of the other*
- Is the learner who, later on, will 'stand on the bridge' or 'be the bridge' between different languages and cultures

* (*European Language Portfolio. Intercultural experience and awareness*)

It is important to remember that intercultural learning develops best when it starts at early primary school because...

- Children may internalise stereotypes and negative attitudes towards difference from the age of 5. The younger they are exposed to tolerance and intercultural thinking, the more the chances these stereotypes will be broken down.
- Children already experience pluriculturalism and plurilingualism in their classroom. Within this context they learn who they and others are.
- Intercultural skills are more easily and more effectively developed during childhood
- Children have more time to internalise and develop the values and ethos of intercultural communication throughout schooling

Closely associated with Intercultural learning is the notion of interculturality. According to the Autobiography of Intercultural encounters of the Council of Europe (2009:10) *"Interculturality refers to the capacity to experience cultural otherness, and to use this experience to reflect on matters that are usually taken for granted within one's own culture and environment. Interculturality involves being open to, interested in, curious about and empathetic towards people from other cultures, and using this heightened awareness of otherness to evaluate one's own everyday patterns of perception, thought, feeling and behaviour in order to develop greater selfknowledge and self-understanding. Interculturality thus enables people to act as mediators among people of different cultures, to explain and interpret different perspectives. It also enables people to function effectively and achieve interactional and transactional goals in situations where cultural otherness and difference are involved. Notice that, according to this definition, interculturality does not involve identifying with another cultural group or adopting the cultural practices of the other group"*.

Intercultural awareness and intercultural competence in foreign language teaching

Intercultural learning is not reduced to Greek language learning but concerns all language learning. New approaches and methods of foreign language education have been advocated in the last few decades, aiming at organizing programmes whose purpose is not merely to provide cultural information but, through the teaching and learning of language in use, to develop a cultural awareness and, more importantly, skills for communication that is culturally sensitive and accommodating to the interlocutors -often assumed to be L1 speakers of the target language.

What is 'intercultural awareness'?



Intercultural awareness indicates sensitivity to the cultural dimension of language learning which views language as a culturally embedded phenomenon that encodes and reproduces values and practices of a given society. This approach suggests that an objective of an intercultural learner is development of multiple communicative competences (e.g. linguistic, cultural, discursive) that are required for effective negotiation of shared meanings during intercultural encounters. Cultures vary across national and regional borders and understanding their dynamism involves skills of active interpretation and a great degree of conscious reflection on the gaps between the native culture of a learner and the culture introduced through the target language. What is self-evident about the learner's lifestyle might not be so in the reality of another culture. The first step to being 'intercultural' is understanding that many rituals are a matter of culture-specific convention. For instance, national food is a very frequent and superficial illustration of cultural diversity. But, eating practices, which play a major role in structuring our lives, are often neglected.

Understanding one's native culture is facilitated by the encounter with the 'otherness' of different perspectives and values which remain unconscious until an effort on behalf of a learner is made to stimulate critical awareness about them. Learning a foreign language results in new insights about a target culture and a re-examination of one's own. Yet, another example suggests that knowledge of one's own and foreign values reveals that culture holds sway of our fundamental aspects of thinking, behaviour and relationship-building.

An intercultural learner does not perceive cultural schemata as universal and upholds and implements the ideas of cultural relativism. Cultural diversity is not considered to be a threat from the foreign to the norms and rules of the native culture, which often escalates into fear (xenophobia), but is appreciated as a source of mutual enrichment among peoples. Therefore, intercultural language learning highlights the importance of positive attitudes free of hostility and prejudice. Stereotypical preconceptions, for example, often influence the real-life relations among individuals and even nations and result in discrimination and inequality.

Intercultural awareness aims at constructive communication among people from different cultural backgrounds who attempt to resolve conflicts and tensions and face interactive challenges in order to promote understanding and cooperation among cultural groups. Living in Europe today creates a framework for experiential intercultural learning, not limited to the classroom boundaries, which should contribute to recognizing and overcoming prejudices, affirmation of diverse European identities and coexisting in harmony and respect.

What is intercultural competence?

The 'intercultural dimension' in language teaching aims to develop learners as intercultural speakers or mediators who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity. It is based on perceiving the interlocutor as an individual whose qualities are to be discovered, rather than as a representative of an externally ascribed identity. Intercultural communication is communication on the basis of respect for individuals and equality of human rights as the democratic basis for social interaction. So language teaching with an intercultural dimension continues to help learners to acquire the linguistic competence needed to communicate in speaking or writing, to formulate what they want to say/write in



correct and appropriate ways. But it also develops their intercultural competence i.e. their ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality.

Michael Byram, Bella Gribkova and Hugh Starkey, *Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching. A practical introduction for teachers*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2002.

Intercultural communicative competence has become a significant goal of language teaching in order to prepare learners to engage actively with people from other ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and to help foster a deeper understanding of different cultural practices and world views.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is seen by many language teaching professionals as an extension of communicative competence. Intercultural communicative competence is the ability to interact successfully with people, either from a different or the same cultural system. It is not another skill but a combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values, necessary to the children's *emotional and social development*. Intercultural communicative competence is not only connected to a school curriculum or subject, but also provides a general way to perceive "subjects" of the world around us. Byram and Fleming (1998: 9) claim that someone who has intercultural competence "has knowledge of one, or, preferably, more cultures and social identities and has the capacity to discover and relate to new people from other contexts for which they have not been prepared directly".

Byram has developed a model of intercultural communicative competence (1997) detailing the attitudes, knowledge and skills that are needed in addition to linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence. More specifically, intercultural Communicative Competence is composed of **intercultural knowledge/savoirs**, **intercultural know-how/savoir-faire** and **intercultural being/savoir-etre**.

- **Knowledge ("savoir")** refers to knowledge of social groups, of their products and practices in one's own and in another country (also called 'declarative knowledge'). Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target communities' produce intercultural awareness.
- **Skills and know-how ("savoir faire")**, refer to the ability to function and interact effectively in the target language
- **Being "savoir-etre"** involves developing the attitudes, motivations, values, beliefs, cognitive styles and personality traits linked to an "intercultural personality" (also called 'existential competence')
- **The ability to learn ('savoir-apprendre')** refers to the ability to observe, participate, acquire and incorporate new knowledge into the existing one.

Based on Byram's model, the young intercultural learner will

- ✓ **learn to know**, by coming into contact with other languages and worldviews



- ✓ **learn to do**, by acquiring skills that will help them to form her/his social identity
- ✓ **learn to live together**, by appreciating difference, interdependence, solidarity and co-operation
- ✓ **learn to be**, by developing her/his individuality and cultural identity to its full

Fantini (2000: 28) also describes five constructs that should be developed for successful intercultural communication: awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge and language proficiency. Furthermore, he also cites the following commonly used attributes to describe the intercultural speaker: respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, motivation, a sense of humour, tolerance for ambiguity, and a willingness to suspend judgment. Empathy, not to be confused with sympathy, is viewed as an attitude, namely the apprehension of another's emotional state or condition.

All this suggests that language learners must develop a cultural sensitivity which goes beyond familiarization with the target linguistic group's culture. It suggests that they should develop a substantial recognition and tolerance for cultural diversity in general, and an understanding that people across cultures have different ways of thinking, acting, and participating in groups –ways that are not to be considered better or worse than 'ours', but different. Finally, it suggests that language learners should be given the opportunity to see that, during communication, these differences must be negotiated; otherwise, it is likely that communication will break down. Language learning in this sense becomes a means for the development of *intercultural awareness*, tolerance and understanding as well as of *intercultural communicative competence*. With the knowledge that cultural differences are a given, the foreign language learner has to somehow realize that, in order to negotiate meanings with his/her interlocutor, s/he may have to implicitly or explicitly explain his/her own ways of saying and doing things. This, of course, entails a consciousness into one's own cultural meanings, patterns and practices –a consciousness developed sometimes by being offered the opportunity to have a monitored contact with that which is different, with the purpose of helping language learners to become increasingly open to acquiring such awareness. This, in fact, may be an essential goal in itself in foreign language teaching and learning. Attention to intercultural aspects in language learning leads to a different kind of judgment about who good language learners are. That is, learners who are aware of their own identities and cultures, and of how they are perceived by others, and who also have an understanding of the identities and cultures of those with whom they are interacting. These 'intercultural speakers', according to Byram and Zarate (1994), are able to establish relationships between their own and the other cultures, to mediate or explain difference, and ultimately to accept it and perhaps even understand the logic behind it.

Developing intercultural competence in the language classroom

In thinking about the above, one can easily arrive to the conclusion that the development of cultural awareness is a long term-project which can be effective if all of language education in school purposefully aims towards it such awareness. Mother tongue education, for example, should ideally lead to understanding but also critically reassessing what one has come to accept as the only culturally acceptable way of doing things. Many language

education curricula in today's Europe, particularly concerned with intercultural understanding, make explicit reference to such a goal.

The methodological question which then arises is how to do this. How does language education (mother tongue or foreign language education) help language learners question their own taken-for-granted world and learn to deal with the world of the other? What methods and techniques are most useful in the language classroom? In trying to come up with answers to these questions, language educators have come up with various practical suggestions. A case in point is Byram and Fleming's work mentioned earlier. They propose the use of drama and drama techniques, ethnographic methodologies and modes of experiential learning used in the foreign language programme. The purpose of their proposed FL teaching and learning practices is, they claim, to prepare learners to meet and communicate in cultures and societies other than the specific one usually associated with the language they are learning. They suggest that classroom activity should aim at the:

- integration of linguistic and cultural learning to facilitate communication and interaction;
- comparison of others and self to stimulate reflection on and (critical) questioning of the mainstream culture into which learners have been and continue to be socialised;
- shift in perspective from that which is familiar to that which is unfamiliar.

When an intercultural classroom environment is described, student learning is frequently depicted as learner-centered, engaging, interactive, participatory, and cooperative (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2001; Moore, 2006;). Learners are viewed as anthropologists who explore topics inside and outside the classroom. Teachers are facilitators who guide the learners to actively explore discover, analyze, and evaluate. In such a learning environment, knowledge is shared, new values and opinions are considered, and students take ownership of their own learning (Moeller and Nugent 2014).

European tools for promoting intercultural communicative competence

A) The European Language Portfolio (ELP)

- The ELP is a document in which those who are learning or have learned a language - whether at school or outside school - can record their language learning and cultural experiences. It is developed by the Department of Linguistic Policy of the Council of Europe (1998-2000). The European language Portfolio (**ELP**) is the learners' personal document in which they can record and reflect on their language learning and intercultural experiences. Below are some of the defining features of the ELP:
- It aims at supporting the development of learner autonomy, plurilingualism and intercultural awareness and competence.
- The intercultural dimension of the ELP is explicitly associated with "respect for diversity of cultures and ways of life" (Council for Cultural Cooperation 2000).
- It is designed to help learners become more conscious of their language learning and to encourage them to monitor their own progress.



- It encourages students to engage in self-assessment using “can do” statements.
- It promotes creativity and helps students explore their interests and understand their profiles as language learners.
- It allows learners to take control of their learning and to showcase examples of their best work
- Values all language and intercultural learning, whether it takes place in formal educational contexts or outside them
- Designed to promote plurilingualism and pluriculturalism
- Every model should accommodate *all* the second/foreign languages the owner knows, including those learnt outside formal education
- Every model should prompt the owner to reflect on his/her developing plurilingual and pluricultural identity

The ELP has two primary functions

Pedagogical function - The ELP is designed to make the language learning process more transparent to the learner and foster the development of learner autonomy (cf. the Council of Europe’s commitment to education for democratic citizenship and lifelong learning)

Reporting function - The ELP provides practical evidence of L2 proficiency and intercultural experience

The ELP consists of 3 components

- 1) The **Language Passport** is a record of students’ language skills, qualifications and experiences (in one or more languages, including their own). For the passport, the learner records their profile of language skills in relation to the Common European Framework, a résumé of language learning and intercultural experiences, and a record of certificates and diplomas. This component is particularly useful for:
 - A) Enabling learners to describe their level of proficiency
 - B) Reflecting on partial competence, and on plurilingualism
 - C) Thinking about goals, and how long it will take to achieve them

- 2) **Language Biography** - provides a reflective accompaniment to the ongoing processes of learning and using second languages and engaging with the cultures associated with them; uses “I can” checklists for goal setting and self-assessment

The Language **Biography** facilitates planning, reflection and self-assessment of progress in a number of languages. It’s an ever changing part of the ELP:

- Learners should revisit and update it at frequent intervals.
- They reflect upon and record what they can do and thus become aware of their own progress.



- Learners can look ahead at new targets and think about how they can learn.

Progress can be recorded on several areas:

- Listening
- Speaking Production
- Speaking Interaction
- Reading
- Writing
- Intercultural understanding

3) **Dossier** - collects evidence of L2 proficiency and intercultural experience.

The **Dossier** offers the learner the opportunity to document evidence and illustrate their achievements and experiences recorded in the Passport. The dossier is a personal collection of the learner's work:

- Students file any special pieces of work, pictures or recordings that show their achievement.
- They must take responsibility for what is included, removed or replaced.
- Its contents must be reviewed on a regular basis.

As the dossier grows, it can be divided into different sections. For example:

- Songs and rhymes
- My e-pal
- My pictures and words
- Meeting people
- Stories heard
- Stories read
- Comics
- Interesting websites
- Slideshares created

In the dossier students can include

- Pictures
- e-mail messages
- Selected written work



- Photos
- Postcards
- Audio and video recordings
- Letters
- Games
- Word lists
- Posters
- Diagrams
- Reflections on language learning
- Blog & web page entries

The ELP should be used from the beginning of the child's school life to encourage the development of:

- Learning language strategies: communicating, practising a new language, memorising, applying prior knowledge, listening and understanding
- Value and awareness of other cultures.
- Awareness of self progress.

Intercultural learning can be promoted through the portfolio by devoting more space to intercultural encounters and reflection on cultural similarity as well as difference

For more information see European Language Portfolio www.coe.int/portfolio

The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters

The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters is a concrete response to the recommendations of the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living together as equals in dignity" (<http://www.coe.int/dialogue>), Section 5.3 "Learning and teaching intercultural competences", paragraph 152: "Complementary tools should be developed to encourage students to exercise independent critical faculties including to reflect critically on their own responses and attitudes to experiences of other cultures."

The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters is a tool designed to encourage learners to reflect on their intercultural encounters with people from different cultural backgrounds both abroad and in their home country.

- The make-up of the Autobiography and its questions aim to develop intercultural competence.

- The children select and describe a specific intercultural encounter, analyze their experience and reflect on their intercultural competence as a stimulus to developing their competences further.
- The Autobiography can be used by the English language teacher in the classroom to interview young children about their intercultural experiences based on possible scenarios such as: *after a school holiday, after a school trip, after an encounter with another cultural group, after a major event.*
- The English language teacher can take notes or tape-record the children's responses.
- English language teachers support young learners to express their feelings and share their experiences with the help of simplified questions, pictures, flashcards and additional materials (such as drawings, coloured pencils or puppets).

For more information about the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters see http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default_EN.asp

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/Source/AIE_en/AIEYL_autobiography_young_en.pd

